

STORIES OF 63 SAINTS OF SOUTH INDIA



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Book 4

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KURUMBA NAYANAR

Kurumba Nayanar was a great devotee of Siva. He lived in Perumizhalai, as chief of Mizhalai Nadu and his subjects were also religious like him. He was a Yogi who served the devotees of the Lord not by their asking but by sensing their needs by a rare and special intuition. He gave very generously and graciously his gold and riches to the pious and poor devotees. He comforted the tired and feasted the hungry. He heard the verses of saint Sundarar's Thiru Thondaththokai, praising the life style of the servants of God, their devotion and deliverance. He was so taken by Sundarar and his poems, that he held him as his Guru and began reciting his hymns. As detailed by Sundarar, Kurumba Nayanar meditated and chanted Holy name NAMASIVAYA and was soon able to gain control over his mind. Sundarar proceeded to Kodumkolur, the land of Cheraman Perumal, and from there decided to go to Mount Kailash on the latter's white elephant. Kurumba Nayanar wanted to be there at Mount Kailash before Sundarar to receive him. Hence Kurumba Nayanar was determined to drop his physical body and reach Mount Kailash in his astral body through his Yogic powers, which he had achieved through his meditations. He sat in a deep trance, controlled his breath and turned his mind. His life force shot up to the cerebral region and his soul flew to Kailash to rest at the holy feet of the Lord and to greet saint Sundarar, who just reached there on the white elephant. Kurumba Nayanar was a Panchakshara yogin, as his very life-line seemed to be the five letters NA-MA-SI-VA-YA.



KARAIKKAL AMMAIYAR

In the rich port town of Karaikkal, known for the business ethics of its merchants, was Danadhatta, an honest trader, who by his influence and affluence was like a merchant prince. After many years of prayer he was blessed with a charming girl child called Punitavathi. As was the name the child was chaste, virtuous, devout and dutiful. Even as a child Punitavathi, loved to listen to narrations of the Lord's mercy and glory. She loved reading books of spiritual significance and serving the holy men. With the benevolence of her thoughts and actions, her words were sweet and her smile shone. With her grew her pious nature and poise of stature. A suitable offer for marriage came from Paramadhattan, son of Nitipathi, a merchant prince of Nagappattinam. The marriage was solemnised by the elders and celebrated with gaiety. Danadhatta showered many a wealthy gifts and jewellery and offered a mansion as dowry, requesting his son-in-law to live in the same town with his wife, as he did not want to be away from his daughter. With the blessings of Nitipati also, they started their marital life in peace and plenty. Paramadhattan was fast establishing himself in business, while Punitavati did so in service to the devotees. One day Paramadhatta sent two sweet mangoes home to Punitavati. Shortly she noticed a venerable old man in front of the gate. She served with a single minded devotion in the name of Siva, washing his tired feet and serving him food. She served one of the mangoes to the sage and sent him with an inner satisfaction that is known only in service. Soon her husband came in for his lunch. When she served the food, she also served the other mango for him. He liked taste so much that he asked for



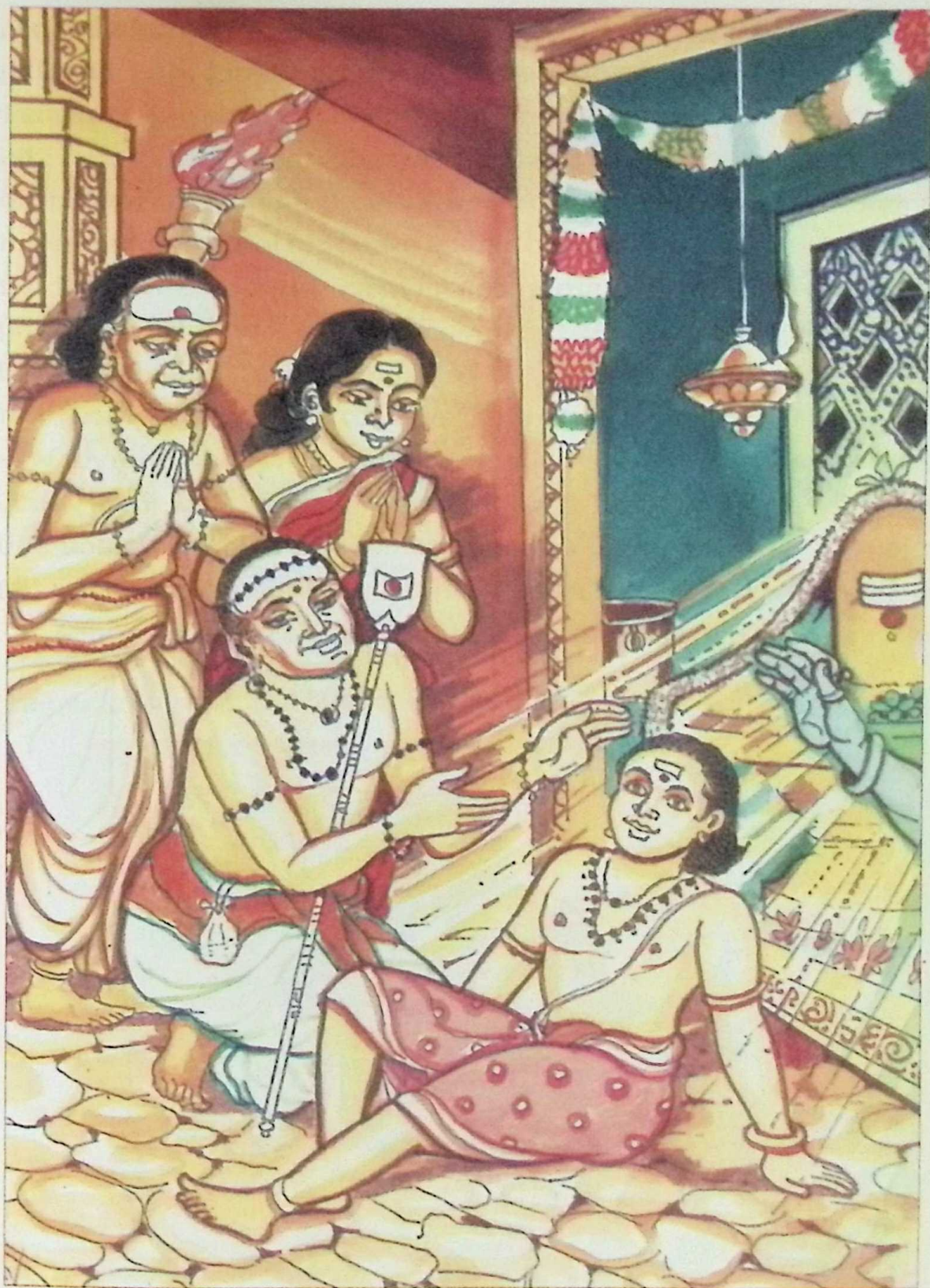
the second mango also. Anxious to serve her husband, she prayed to her Saviour fervently. A mango appeared between her folded hands. She happily served it to her husband. Finding it even tastier than the first one, he asked her for an explanation. As she told him what happened, he asked her to get one more. Again she prayed to the Lord, who once again granted her wish. Paramadhatta was about to eat it, when it disappeared from his hand. Realising her greatness, he decided that a mere mortal like him should not touch her any more. He gathered his goods and set sail for trading. On his return, instead of going home, he settled down at Pandya port, where he married a girl of his choice. A beautiful girl child was born to him, whom he named after his first wife Punithavathiar. In the meantime, Punithavathi was drawn more and more into her devotion to the Lord. But her parents were worried for her and managed finally to locate Paramadhatta's whereabouts and brought her there. Staying in a nearby house, they sent for him. He came forthwith with his wife and daughter and fell at her feet with reverence. To the stunned onlookers, he explained that Punithavathi was not his wife, but his Goddess; she was not a mere human being, but something far above filled with purity and divinity. He said "I would always worship her as Karaikkal Ammaiyaar". At this a new awareness descended on her and she prayed to the Lord that she should shed her human form and become a spirit, which can move anywhere at will. She became like a mere skeleton and the gods in the heaven showered their blessings on her. She travelled to all the holy centres of pilgrimage and sang hymns in praise of the presiding deities. Finally she went to the mount Kailash; not wanting to defile the holy mountain she climbed it with her head. A stunned Goddess Parvati looked questioningly at Siva, who explained that she was a mother

devoted to him. As she neared Him, He called out to her "Come Mother". Asked by Him to state her wish, she said, "I do not want any more births; but if it is Thy wish, then may it be with ceaseless devotion to You". The Lord granted her wish and bade her to go to Thiru Alankadu (37 miles from Madras in Chingleput District) to witness His cosmic dance. Obeying His orders the spirit moved to Thiru Alankadu, wher she sang the beautiful Arpuda Tiru Anthadi.

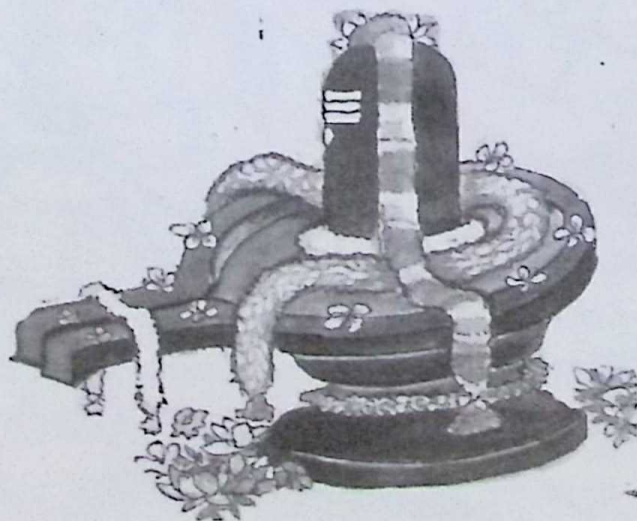


APPUDI ADIGAL

To climb over a roof, some struggle hard to find a foot hold and reach the height. Some others find a ladder or high stool to climb. Appudi Adigal, a Brahmin born in Thingalur, was a noble soul, who sought the lotus feet of Nataraja, founding his faith on his contemporary and Guru Thirunavukkarasu or Appar as he was popularly known. Appudi was a devoted simple soul, who served the fellow human beings, through a lot of charity like establishing water tanks, resting houses, clinics, and inns for travellers, the sick, the old, the poor and the sages. He did it all in the name of his Guru Appar. He adored the Nayanar, even though he had never seen him. One day when Appar himself visited Thingalur, he got to hear that he was the real hero Appudi and all his charitable institutions were named after him. He met Appudi and feigning anonymity, questioned the secret of naming charitable institutions after some one else. He even challenged the greatness of Appar. To his surprise and joy Appar found that Appudi literally worshipped him, and was upset when anyone insulted his beloved saint. Appar was his role model, who had stood all the severe tests, set to him by his enemies, through his divine powers. He also came to know that Appudi's two sons were even named as elder Thirunavukku Arasu and younger Thirunavukku Arasu. Not wanting to try Appudi any more, Appar revealed his identity and declared that he was the humble soul whom the Lord reclaimed to His faith. He accepted an invitation for dinner at Appudi's house. Appudi's joy in meeting and hosting his Guru cannot be expressed in words. His whole family was very happy and prepared a grand feast, while Appar went to meditate.



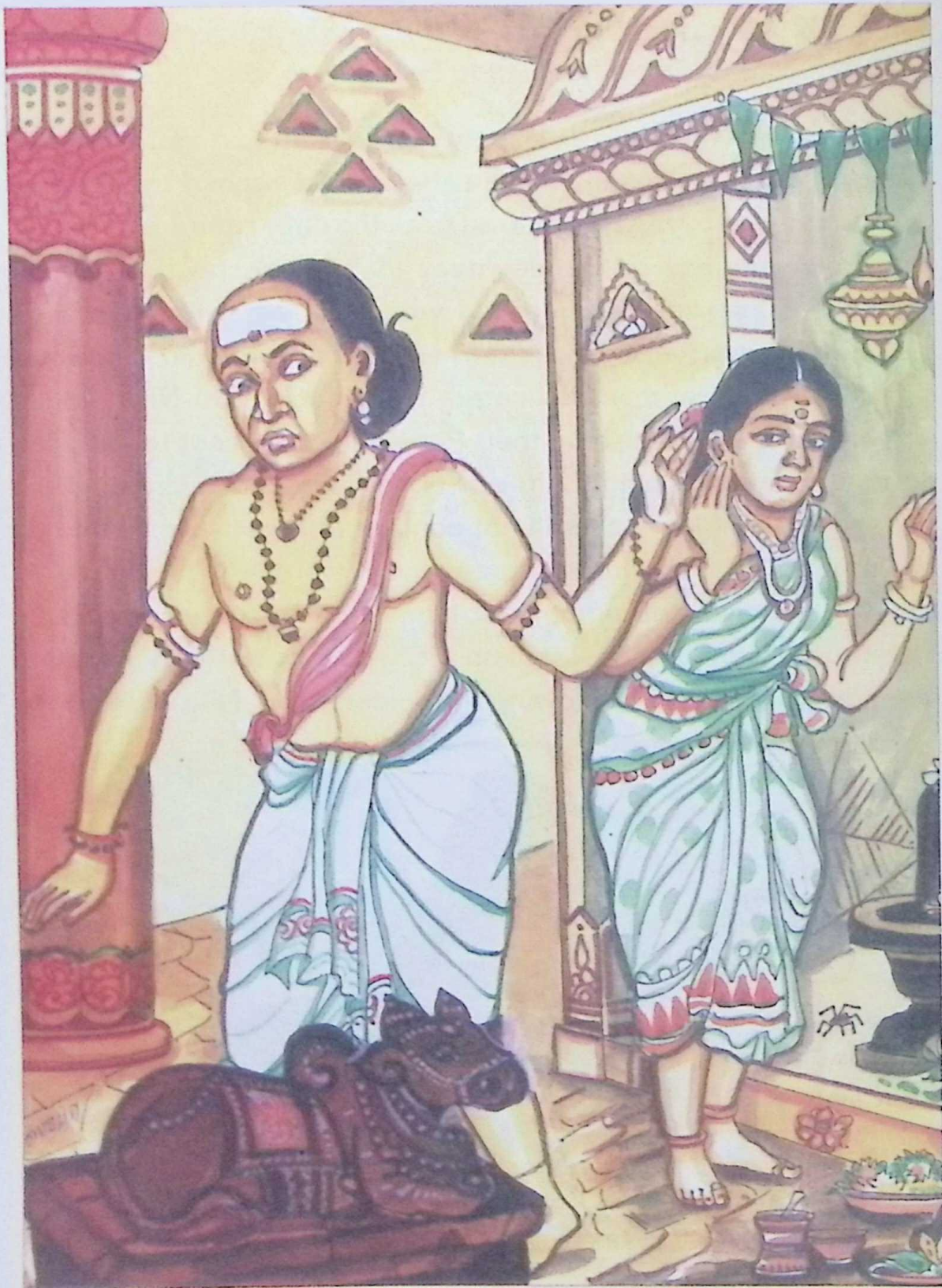
The elder son, who went to the backyard to bring plantain leaves, was bitten by a cobra and died at his mother's feet after handing over the plantain leaf. Appudi's family hid the corpse and their grief and invited the guest for feast. Appar asked for the whereabouts of the elder son and insisted on waiting for him to join the feast. Appudi had no choice except to inform Appar about the cobra bite and the unforeseen mishap. Appar wished that the child's body be brought to the temple and laid there. He then sang ten songs in prayer to the Lord Nilakanta (Siva), who swallowed the poison 'Alahala' to save the Devas, to obliterate the power of the poison infecting his innocent devotee. His fervant prayer was instantly answered and the boy came back to life. Everybody rejoiced. Appar stayed a few more days at Appudi's place and further moved to Tirupazhanam where he composed and sang the verses about the greatness of Appudi Adigal's selfless service.



TIRUNEELANAKKA NAYANAR

In the Cauvery delta, in a county called Sattamangai, Tiru Nila Nakkar was a prominent Vedic scholar. A Brahmin by birth, he was devoted to Siva. He adhered to all the daily rites and rituals in his prayer and served the devotees of Siva irrespective of their caste. Nila Nakkar was blessed with a chaste wife, who took pleasure in assisting her husband in all his noble deeds. Once on a sacred Tiruvadirai day, dedicated to Nataraja, Tiru Nila Nakkar and his wife, after finishing their Pooja at home, went to Ayavanti temple for worshipping. After offering flowers and chanting the Vedas, Nila Nakkar was still not content at heart. He continued his meditation, chanting the great five letters NA-MA-SI-VA-YA. His wife, who was standing near him, while he prayed, spotted a spider that fell on the Lingam. She, in a motherly gesture, immediately reacted by blowing the spider away. Nila Nakkar was





perturbed by the scene and considered that her spittle might have defiled the Lingam. He could not forgive her hasty act and considered it a sin and sacrilege. Nila Nakkar distanced himself from his wife and rebuked her to repent for her sin the rest of her life. She stayed at the temple premises, throughout the night silently praying. Meanwhile the Lord appeared in Nila Nakkar's dream with matted hair and with the moon perched on it. He showed His physical form to Nila Nakkar, which was full of blisters except at the spot where Nila Nakkar's wife had blown. Shocked out of his dream and with a feeling of repentance, he went to the Ayavanti temple and apologised to his wife and brought her back home. His devotion and daily duties continued. He loved the boy devotee, the glorious son, saint Gnanasambandar.

Once he heard that Sambandar was to visit the town and made preparations to welcome him in a grand manner. He gave him and his followers a hearty welcome singing his songs, housed them and provided a delicious dinner. To Pannar Tirunilakanta, who accompanied Sambandar on the stringed instrument Veena, when he sang, Nila Nakkar offered the bedding near the Vedic fire, the holiest spot in the house. Sambandar was pleased to observe his spirit of humanity and sense of equality and sang his praise in a stirring verse, as Tirunilakanta was supposed to have been born in a low caste and their sense of fraternity strengthened. Nila Nakkar frequently met Sambandar and was present at Sambandar's wedding at Nallur. At Nallur a great light engulfed Gnanasambandar and along with him Nila Nakkar and other ardent devotees of Siva were absorbed in the Divine Light. The event proved that God does not differentiate between castes and status, but only looks at the purity of heart.

NAMINANDI ADIGAL

Enapperur near Tiru Arur, was a beautiful village with idyllic settings on the river Cauvery. Naminandi Adigal was a pious Brahmin, who practised all the Vedic rites and rituals to perfection. He would walk to Arur everyday to worship Lord Thyagaraja (Siva) at the temple there, after his daily prayers at home. En route to Arur was the Araneri temple. It was unkempt. By the dint of his discipline he renewed this temple, cleaned the premises and worshipped the Lord everyday. He lighted the lamp and performed the Puja there regularly. One day he went short of oil for the holy lamp and asked in the neighbourhood for help. The neighbours were Jains. They not only declined help, but made fun of his faith. They suggested that the fire in Siva's hand should be sufficient and that he may use water to light the flame. Naminandi relied on his faith and prayed to Siva to assist him. He heard a voice assuring him that his faith was the flame and that with no doubt he should light the holy lamp with water. Naminandi obeyed the voice and to his pleasure the lamps burned well. The Jains were silenced. The miracle added to the faith of the Saivaites and brought fame to Naminandi. The King of Arur appointed him as the executive manager of the grand Arur temple. Naminandi discharged his temple duties with fervour. He organised temple festivals in a grand style to the great joy of the people. But he disliked the crowd and personally preferred to keep to himself. The pride of his birth as a Brahmin restrained him from mingling with the normal crowd. But as a call of his duty, as he had to take the God in a festive procession to Manali, he had to mix with the crowd of various castes and felt himself defiled. That night he



slept outside on the pial. His wife asked him why he did not come in and he answered her explaining his feelings. He said that he felt polluted and that he would enter his room and home only after a bath in the morning. His wife understood the prevailing practice of Brahmins of untouchability of the lower casts. Shortly in Naminandi's dream God appeared and said that all people born in Arur are His own children and His followers and that there was no need for any sort of discrimination and that there was no pollution in mixing with them. Naminandi woke from his sleep, woke his wife and explained his vision of God in his dream. He entered his house. He went to the temple in the morning after bath and saw Siva in all the devotees gathered there for worshipping. A gentle shiver passed through his whole being at the thought of the divine dream and the vision he had. He thanked God for the awakening in him to humanity and God's love. Naminandi's devotion has been acclaimed by Saint Appar in his songs.



TIRUMULA NAYANAR

Tirumular ranks chief among the perfect yogic masters, as the name in Tamil simply suggests. He was a saint, seer, poet and a mystic beyond psychic consciousness. His book "Tirumandiram" ("holy spell") delves in to the histories of life and its mystery. It is understood that he lived between A.D. 100 and 900. He was one of the Sivanatha Siddhas that lived on Mount Kailash. He was the disciple of Nandi Deva, by whose grace he became a perfect yogin and headed all Siddhas and attained purest joy in the oneness of his soul with the God. His original name is not known. Tirumular was a friend of Sage Agastya who lived up the Podigai Hills in the Tirunelveli District. The Yogi once set out to see the sage. On the way he bathed in the Ganges and other rivers, visited all the famous pilgrim centres Kedar, Nepal, Kasi, Tirupathi, Kalahasti, Alangadu, Kanchi, Chidambaram, where he meditated for a few days. He was delighted with the cosmic dance of Siva in the heart of beings. He avoided seacoasts, for the sea gave poison to Siva,





when the demons and devas were churning the ocean for 'the elixir'. So he travelled along Cauveri bank and reached Tiru - Avadu - Turai. There he worshipped the lord Pasupathi, (Siva) and proceeded to Sattanur. Sattanur is a fair green village nourished by the river Cauvery. There was a simple shepherd in the village called Mulan tending cows lovingly and devoting himself to faith in God. He was a pure soul and our Yogin watched him keenly. One day the young shepherd died while tending the cows on the meadow; the cows gathered around his body and shed tears as he had loved them all dearly and entertained them on his lute at leisure. The old yogin was moved by such universal love and by his yogic powers, leaving his old body behind, transferred his spirit in to the body of Mulan. The cows were happy and contented; they grazed and drank and returned to their respective homes after sunsèt. But Mulan himself did not enter his home. Mulan had a young wife, who dearly loved him and entreated him to come home. Mulan resisted her touch and informed her of what happened. Then he moved into a monastery and went in to meditation. The wife was very upset and convinced the wisemen of the village about him, thinking that he was either ill or that he was possessed. But soon they found out on speaking to Mulan that the shepherd was dead and that a sage had entered the body of Mulan. He was a missionary and that he must not be disturbed. The head of the monastery stood as guard for him and his wife left him alone. Mulan returned to Tiru - Avadu - Turai and sat in a superconscious trance under the bo tree west of the temple walls. He wrote all his revelations in quatrains and gave the world "Tirumandiram".

KALIKAMA NAYANAR

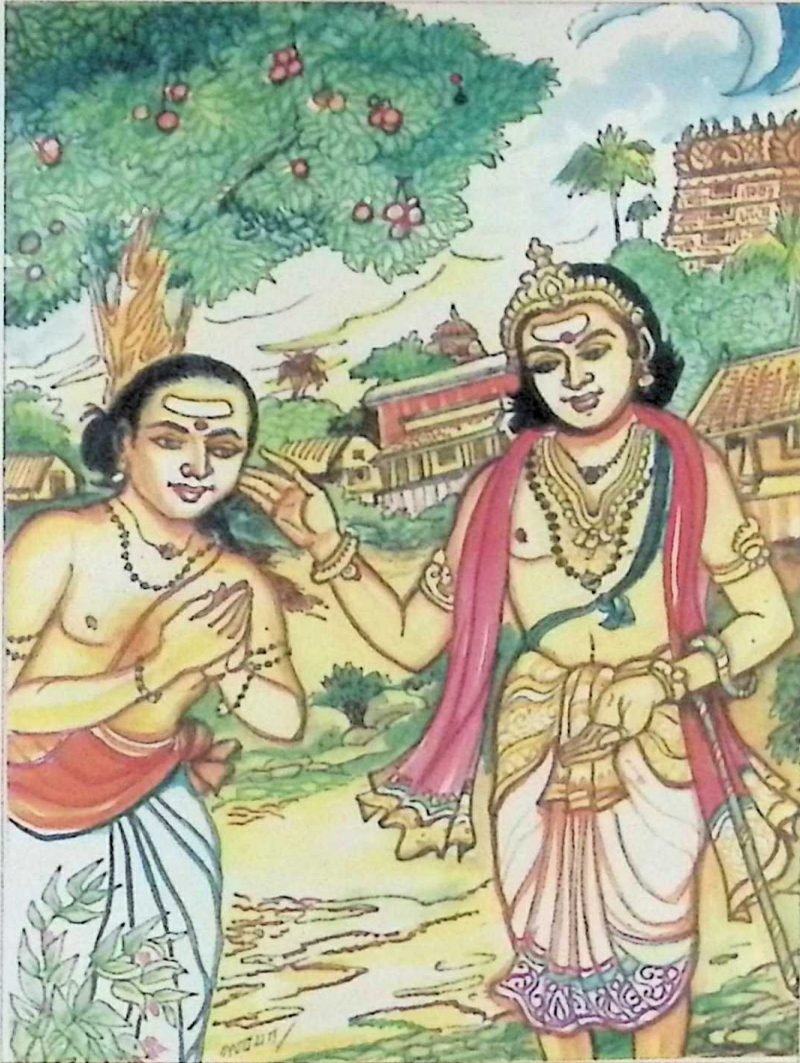
This is yet another story of a saint where the Gods' grace reigned that love and amity are the essence of life. Kalikama Nayanar hailed from the Eayakone family of Tiru Mangalam. As the name of the town Tiru Mangalam itself denotes, it is a place of auspicious life style, situated on the north bank of Cauvery river; sanctified by the devotees of Lord Siva. The family of Eayakone has also the fame of military commandment in the Chola army. And Kalikamar was a gem in the family of devotees to God and God lovers. Kalikamar lived in the same period as Sundaramurthi Nayanar. When he came to hear of Sundaramurthi Nayanar using his Lord Siva as a page boy and aide to negotiate with Paravai Nachiar, he felt personally offended and vowed vengeance against Sundarar. As Sundarar came to know of this, he was worried by the wrath he had incurred and prayed to good friend and Great Lord to arrange the situation. Lord Siva devised a game plan and let Kalikamar suffer from an acute colic pain and informed him in the dreams that Sundarar alone could cure that pain. But Kalikamar's sense of pride and justice did not allow this and he decided that instead of being defiled by Sundarar's touch of treatment, it was better to die. So thinking he stabbed himself and died. But the grace of Siva revived him to new life and then he became the friend of Sundarar. We will also see more of him in our account of saint Sundarar's life.



MURKHA NAYANAR

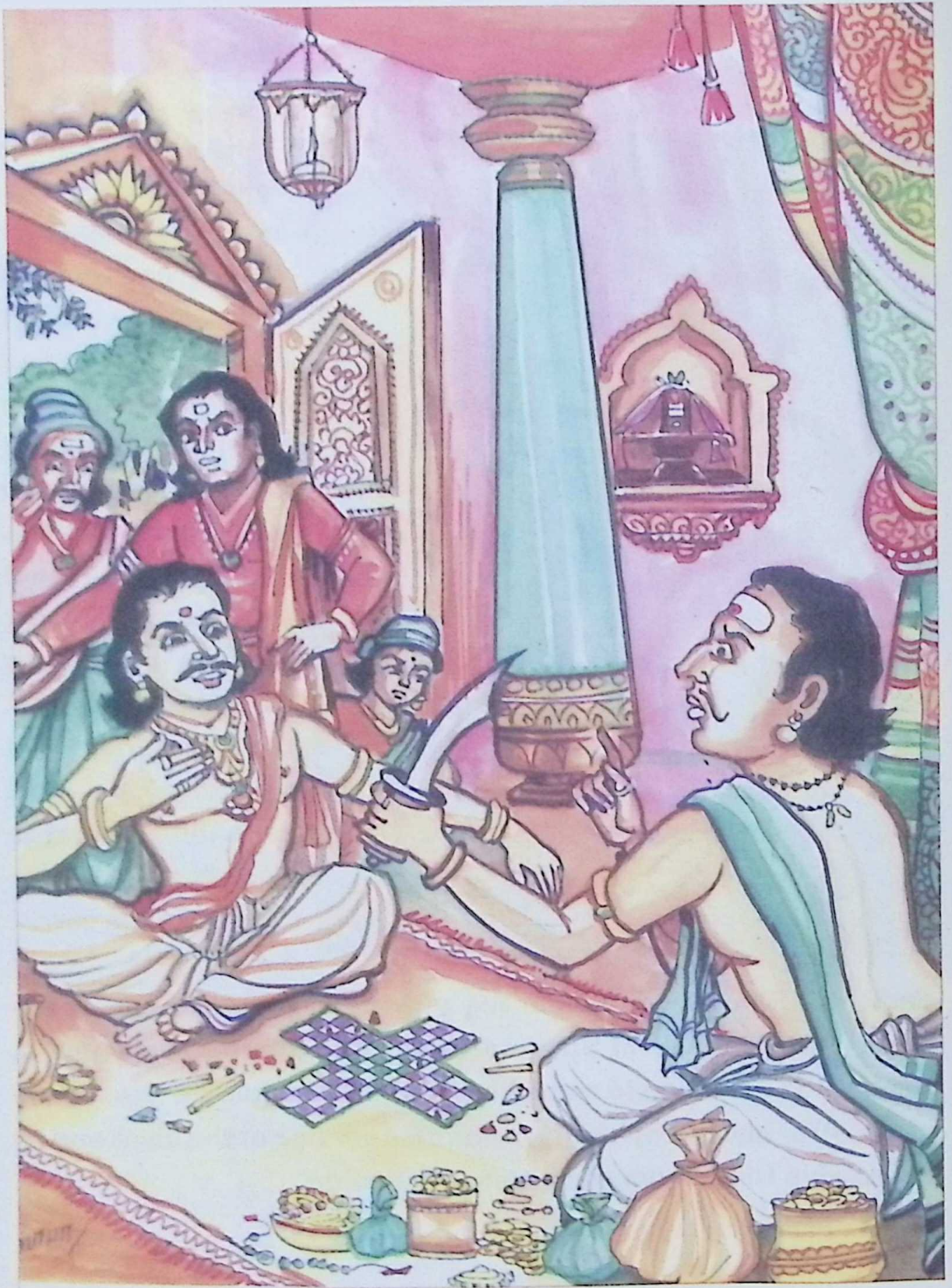
People may vary but God is one. The approach may vary yet the aim is the same - to serve for the love of God. Murkha Nayanar was a gambler and a ruffian as his name suggested and would raise his sword whenever he encountered dishonesty and treachery. He lived at Tiruverkadu situated on the Palar river in Tondainadu, the same that was immortalised in the hymns of Sundarar. He loved Lord Siva and served His devotees providing them food and shelter at any cost. It was always service before self and he lost all his personal wealth in serving the devotees of the Lord. Yet he kept his resolve and continued his service by winning at gambling. Yes, he was an expert gambler, who knew his cards well and if and when he found the other gamblers cunning or dishonest, he never lost a moment to punish them. When there was no one in Tiruverkadu to challenge him, he moved to other places and finally he went to Kumbakonam (Tiru Kudanthai) and continued with his charity by the only means of earning money he was used to, that is, by gambling. This relentless service expiated him from his sins and his true love made him a saint and his image is worshipped in the local temple even today.

SOMASI MARA NAYANAR



In the Chola country, well known for its abundance of wealth and natural resources, there was a village called Tiruvambar where Somasi Mara Nayanar lived. He was a virtuous man, scholarly and sincere, who simply devoted his life to the service of the Lord by serving his devotees. He lived up to the saying that God is love. He controlled the carnal desires and

dedicated the five senses in the service to the devotees of the Lord. He adored Saint Sundarar whom he venerated only next to the Lord and wishing to serve him in his service to Siva, he settled in Tiru Arur and spent his life in intimate service of the saint and by singing his Thevarama and attained salvation.





STORIES OF 63 SAINTS OF SOUTH INDIA

The Periyapuram, delineating the lives of the 63 famous Saivite saints of Tamil Nadu, known popularly as the "Arupathumoonru Nayanmar," was written by Sekkizhar, a wise chief minister of the Chola kingdom. Since then these stories have been narrated by countless generations of scholars in the temples of Tamil Nadu, and retold in both Tamil and English.

The devotion of these saints to Lord Siva was all encompassing. They were prepared to sacrifice not only their material wealth but even their lives and those of their families in the service of the Lord and His devotees. The numerous verses composed by the 63 saints in praise of Lord Siva in the various temples of Tamil Nadu have stood the test of time. The life histories of these saints serve as a role model to young people, and speak of the importance of devotion to duty and commitment to society.

The present stories have been retold in simple English for the benefit of young readers in India and abroad by Kalpana Ramani, Asha Kannan and Bhama Chandran, and edited by Lakshmi Venkatraman. Every story is brought to life in the evocative illustrations of Subha. This book is the first in a series of eight volumes envisaged by the Koviloor Adinam Children's Book Trust.

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